

REMARKS

The applicants note with appreciation the acknowledgement of the claim for priority under section 119 and the notice that all of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received.

The applicants acknowledge and appreciate receiving an initialed copy of the form PTO-1449 that was filed on 9 February 2004.

Claims 2 – 10 are pending. Claims 1 and 11 – 14 have been canceled without prejudice. The applicants respectfully request reconsideration and allowance of this application in view of the above amendments and the following remarks.

The applicants note with appreciation the examiner's indication that claims 5 – 9 would be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims. Accordingly, claim 5 has been presented in independent form above to include claim 1, and it is respectfully submitted that claim 5 as rewritten is allowable. Claim 1 was canceled, and claims dependent from claim 1 have been amended to depend from allowable claim 5. In view of the above, the applicants submit that the claims are patentable.

The applicants have rewritten the claims in independent form since the office action indicated that claims 5 – 9 would be allowable if so re-written. However, the applicants do not concede that other features in the claims are found in the prior art.

The applicants wish to clarify for the record, if necessary, that the claims have been amended to expedite prosecution. Moreover, the applicants reserve the right to pursue the original subject matter in a continuation application.

Any narrowing amendment to the claims in the present Amendment is not to be construed as a surrender of any subject matter between the original claims and the present claims; rather this is merely an attempt at providing one or more definitions of what the applicants believe to be suitable patent protection. In addition, the present claims provide the intended scope of protection that the applicants are seeking for this application. Therefore, no estoppel should be presumed, and the applicants' claims are intended to include a scope of protection under the Doctrine of Equivalents.

For all the reasons advanced above, the applicants respectfully submit that the claims as amended are allowable.

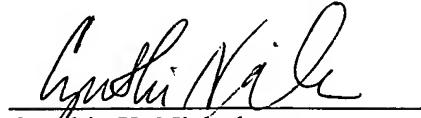
Claims 1 – 4 were rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent 5,168,189, Dam et al. and combined with U.S. Patent 5,998,908, Goodson. In view of the above amendments, it is respectfully submitted that the rejection is moot.

Claims 11 – 14 were withdrawn from consideration and are now canceled without prejudice.

In view of the foregoing, the applicants respectfully submit that this application is in condition for allowance. A timely notice to that effect is respectfully requested. If questions relating to patentability remain, the examiner is invited to contact the undersigned by telephone.

Please charge any unforeseen fees that may be due to Deposit Account No. 50-1147.

Respectfully submitted,



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